



General Assembly

Fifty-eighth session

65th plenary meeting

Monday, 1 December 2003, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 38

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/58/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/416)

Draft resolutions (A/58/L.23, A/58/L.24, A/58/L.25 and A/58/L.26/Rev.1)

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Papa Louis Fall of Senegal, who, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will introduce draft resolutions A/58/L.23 to A/58/L.26/Rev.1 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Fall (spoke in French): Today marks the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which is observed on the 29 November, as designated by the General Assembly. It is customary that on the day of observance, the Assembly takes up the item entitled "Question of Palestine".

The President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and several other high officials addressed the solemn meeting held this morning, which colleagues

and representatives from Missions here in New York also attended.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to thank you all for your show of support each year and for your active interest and involvement in the tireless search for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Before I introduce to you the four draft resolutions approved by our Committee last month, allow me to now refer very briefly to the situation on the ground and the subsequent developments in the political arena.

Over the past several months, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remained very tense. There has been hardly any tangible progress in the implementation of the Quartet's road map. Despite years of effort and great reserves of patience aimed at ending the conflict and making peace between the two parties and despite the various agreements reached, the occupying Power has persisted in its illegal actions in the occupied territory. Palestinians still suffer under the Israeli policies of closures and curfews — an inadmissible form of collective punishment, which compromises their livelihood and hinders their access to their workplaces, schools and families.

The Israeli army often raided Palestinian towns, leaving in its wake death, desolation and destruction. Humanitarian workers were prohibited from delivering essential services to needy Palestinians, especially in

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refugee camps. While recognizing and strongly reaffirming Israel's legitimate right to security, the Committee nonetheless unequivocally condemns its policy and practice of extrajudicial killings, which are inadmissible under international humanitarian law. In a related matter, the Committee also condemns just as strongly all terrorist attacks — whatever their origin — against civilians in Israel, as these acts have no moral or legal justification and only threaten to undo any progress in the efforts to bring the two parties to reconciliation and peace.

Faced with a situation that is as alarming as this one and that has greatly moved the international community, the Tenth Emergency Special Session has been reconvened on two occasions in the last three months. On 25 September, the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/ES-10/12 demanding that Israel, the occupying Power, desist from any act of deportation and threat to the physical integrity and the safety of the elected President of the Palestinian Authority and immediately lift the illegal siege imposed on President Arafat. In its resolution ES-10/13 of 21 October, the Assembly demanded that Israel stop the construction of the separation wall in the occupied territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, and dismantle that work, which deviates from the Armistice Line of 1949 and is in manifest contradiction to relevant provisions of international law.

In this regard, the General Assembly asked the Secretary-General to report periodically on compliance with that resolution, with the first report focusing on the separation wall. The construction of the wall prejudices the outcome of future permanent status negotiations and makes the formation of a contiguous Palestinian State virtually impossible. Moreover, those actions heighten the feelings of anger and humiliation among Palestinians and incite more acts of violence.

Wishing to avert the worst case and wishing to extract the peace negotiations from the vicious cycle of violence, prominent Israelis and Palestinians from civil society have reached out to each other in order to explore together other possible paths that might work to end that impasse. Those initiatives, which have been welcomed by the entire international community, are regarded as consistent with the road map and seek to revive it. While those initiatives cannot take the place of official negotiations, the initiatives, including the Geneva Accords, deserve praise and encouragement. We congratulate the parties who have been involved in

this noble and courageous undertaking for their efforts, under the enlightened leadership of friendly countries such as Switzerland.

Other positive developments have emerged that signal the possible resumption of a political dialogue between the parties. From that standpoint, we welcomed the confirmation last month of Mr. Ahmed Qurei as Prime Minister of Palestine, as well as the confirmation of the new Cabinet. Negotiations are continuing among various Palestinian organizations for a possible renewal of the ceasefire with Israel. The Israeli Prime Minister recently reiterated his Government's acceptance of the road map. We commend that action, although he did again refer to the 14 so-called clarifications or reservations.

While these small steps are encouraging and remain significant, the Committee calls for full implementation of the road map requirements. It calls on Israel to cease all acts of intimidation and harassment of Palestinians, to lift closures and curfews against the Palestinians and to immediately put a stop to its construction of the separation wall and expansion of settlements. On the other hand, the Committee urges the Palestinian Authority to increase and persevere in its efforts to meet the legitimate security concerns of Israel.

In an effort to give the peace process a fresh impetus, the Security Council on 21 November unanimously adopted resolution 1515 (2003). With that resolution, the Security Council finally endorsed the Quartet's Performance-based Road map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and called on the parties to fulfil their obligations under the road map, in cooperation with the Quartet, in order to achieve a vision of the two States living side by side in peace and security. Strengthened by that resolution, which demonstrates the Council's intention to remain fully engaged in the efforts towards achieving peace in the Middle East, the international community must remain at the forefront of the search for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a just comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The United Nations should maintain its permanent responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine, until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). For its part, our Committee will remain committed to supporting the road map and the work of the Quartet,

until such time that the Palestinian people are able to finally exercise their inalienable rights.

In this context, I would like to introduce to the Assembly the four draft resolutions approved by the Committee and circulated under this agenda item, namely A/58/L.23, A/58/L.24, A/58/L.25 and A/58/L.26/Rev.1.

Before I do that, however, allow me to inform you that certain delegations have joined the sponsors of the four draft resolutions. Bangladesh, Togo and Mali have joined as sponsors of draft resolution A/58/L.23. Bangladesh and Mali have joined as sponsors of draft resolution A/58/L.24. Bangladesh and Mali have joined as sponsors of draft resolution A/58/L.25. Lastly, Bangladesh, Mali and Togo have joined as sponsors of draft resolution A/58/L.26/Rev.1.

The first three draft resolutions relate to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights, and the work of the Department of Public Information, respectively. They reaffirm the important mandate entrusted to those entities in the past by the General Assembly and guarantee continuing support for the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for a just and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question.

As in the past, the Committee would retain the central role it has been given concerning that issue and would ensure that resources available to it are employed in a cost-effective manner for all activities mandated by the General Assembly.

The fourth draft resolution, A/58/L.26/Rev.1, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine" reflects the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential elements of such a settlement and includes references to the developments of the past year and recent weeks, as I just outlined them. This year's draft has been updated to reflect key developments on the ground and in the political area. Acting on the authorization granted by the Committee membership at the last Committee meeting on 11 November 2003, the Bureau of the Committee has been able to continue negotiations with the various parties involved. As a result, a certain number of amendments have been accepted and introduced by various sponsors, mostly in the preambular part of the draft resolution.

These are the four draft resolutions that I have just submitted for your consideration. They underscore the positions, mandates and programmes that are of fundamental importance, particularly at the present critical stage. I would therefore like to call on the General Assembly to express its support for these four draft resolutions by the greatest possible majority of votes.

The President: I now call on Mr. Victor Camilleri of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/58/35.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The report covers the developments through 9 October 2003, relating to the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee since last year's report.

The introduction of the report outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the year. Special emphasis was given to the various specific aspects of the situation on the ground, including Israeli actions in response to the Intifada; the settlement activity; the implications of the construction of the wall in the West Bank; the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners; the humanitarian situation and the state of the Palestinian economy; the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians; action by the United Nations system; and the continuing operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In that chapter,

the Committee also clearly states its position with regard to extrajudicial executions of Palestinians and terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee and is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council. That section makes reference to the communications addressed by the Chairman of the Committee to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council and statements made by the Committee over the year in reaction to events on the ground. Also included is information on the participation by the Chairman at various international forums.

Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat. It also provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union. The section gives an account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year; the Committee's cooperation with civil society; the research, monitoring and publications work of the Division for Palestinian Rights; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 57/109 of 3 December 2002.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In that chapter, the Committee expresses its concern over the lack of serious headway in the political process and the absence of any tangible improvement in the area of security. It emphasizes that the United Nations should maintain its permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. The Committee further stresses the critical peacemaking role played by the Security Council and expresses its

view that the Council, among other things, could and should encourage steps towards creating an effective mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the road map and for protection of the Palestinian population, including by authorizing the deployment of international observers.

The Committee affirms its intention to continue to promote support for the road map and the important work of the Quartet in pursuance of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and other relevant resolutions, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights.

The Committee stresses its strong opposition to the illegal construction by the occupying Power of the wall in the occupied West Bank and in areas close to East Jerusalem, and reminds the Government of Israel that this construction has devastating immediate and longer-term implications for the livelihood of the Palestinian people and endangers international efforts at resolving the conflict and realizing the vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, are to live side by side in peace and security, as outlined in the road map.

The Committee calls upon the international community, most notably the Security Council and the General Assembly, to attach the necessary importance to that issue with a view to stopping the de facto annexation of Palestinian land and the construction of the wall by the occupying Power.

The Committee expresses appreciation for the involvement of Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society in its programme of international and regional meetings and conferences aimed at helping to promote constructive analysis and discussion of the various aspects of the question of Palestine and to mobilize international assistance for the Palestinian people.

The Committee further commends civil society organizations for their efforts at supporting international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and mobilizing public opinion, as well as for their unremitting initiatives to provide relief and assistance to the Palestinian people.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat

in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other information activities, including further development of the UNISPAL documents collection. The Committee also notes the usefulness of the annual training programme conducted for staff of the Palestinian Authority, in spite of the difficulties on the ground, and requests the Division to continue it.

The Committee expresses the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion on the relevant issues. The Committee requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of the Committee's role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on this very important issue.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, His Excellency, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly. We are confident that you will conduct the deliberations of this session with great efficiency because of your unique skills and capabilities.

We would like to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, the former President of the General Assembly, for leading the work of the fifty-seventh session. We would also like to express our appreciation for the diligent efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his adherence to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations in promoting international peace and security. Finally, we would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, for their persistent efforts in the service of the Palestinian cause and in working towards security and stability in the Middle East.

During the past three years of the Palestinian intifada, Israel has worked hard to destroy all the remaining vestiges of the Oslo Agreements and their achievements, whether they are in the form of the Palestinian Authority's institutions and security systems, or in its infrastructure — all of which were primarily tied to the Oslo era. The escalation of Israeli aggression reached its climax with the siege against the elected Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, at his headquarters, threatening his physical safety. Israel has thus set a precedent in modern history by taking a formal and public decision to liquidate the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, when it chooses to do so.

Israel has also worked to obstruct all international initiatives to calm the situation and to resume negotiations. It rushed to implement its political plans on the ground by building a racist separation wall, which draws new borders that would annex large settlements, isolate Palestinians in cantons and determine the sovereignty over Jerusalem, as well as water rights, in its own favour. It has also endorsed a law that prevents the return of refugees to areas occupied in 1948.

Even more dangerous than the foregoing is the Jewish State's success in imposing its concept of peace on the agenda of peace initiatives, limiting the concept of peace to a debate on security and terrorism, thus removing the Palestinians' legitimate rights from the discussion.

Israeli Prime Minister Sharon has claimed that ever since his rise to power he has been working on providing security for Israel. But he has failed. Three years later he has failed to make good on those promises. In truth, Sharon wanted to seize Palestinian land and annex it to Israel in order to satisfy his greedy desires. He thus began seizing and confiscating more land and building more Israeli settlements. He built the racist separation wall and found nobody to deter him. Instead, he found support and protection by the United States of America, whose president, George Bush, announced that Israel has the right to defend itself against Palestinian resistance.

Barak, before Sharon, had manoeuvred during the Camp David Summit in July, 2000, to impose a final status solution that did not even meet the bare minimum of legitimate Palestinian demands. When he failed, he waged an unjust campaign under the slogan of removing the mask from Arafat's face, whom he portrayed as the man who turned down the most generous Israeli offer for peace. In fact, Barak officially prevented members of the Israeli negotiating team from handing over any written document to the Palestinians to keep them and public opinion in the dark. That is how Barak rigged the failure of negotiations and delivered a blow to the peace camp in Israel. Barak's master stroke came when he announced that Arafat was no longer a partner in the peace process.

Last year, on 29 November, Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Mr. Yehuda Lancry, from this very podium, 54 years after the vote on the partitioning of Palestine, announced that the Government of Israel supported the creation of a Palestinian State. He was quickly refuted by Sharon — who issued a statement that Lancry was voicing a strictly personal opinion — because Sharon only sees a military solution to the conflict. Continued settlement activity, for Sharon, is of the utmost importance to Israel's security. In order to reassure the international community, Sharon has declared his willingness to accept a Palestinian State — but only on 42 per cent of the territory of the West Bank, or 9 per cent of the lands legitimately belonging to Arab Palestine. These are divided into separate demilitarized cantons connected by bridges and tunnels over which Israel would maintain security control by land, sea and air, and with the additional condition that the current Palestinian leadership be exiled.

The Palestinian intifada has refuted Sharon's belief that what cannot be solved by force will be solved by more force. All the violence that has characterized Israeli behaviour has not achieved Israel's security. We can thus draw lessons from the past three years: a solution cannot be imposed by force. Rather, it is diplomacy and politics that can guarantee security for everyone. Israeli officials, who are optimistic that the intifada will end soon, are ignorant of the fact that the Palestinian resistance is an affirmation of the political presence of a people under occupation. As long as the occupation persists, so will the intifada, regardless of its momentum or its forms —

whether through armed action, violence or demonstrations as a necessary means of self-defence, as well as a means of protecting our legitimate right to end Israeli occupation.

We expected the United States to help to deter Israel from its terrorist actions in the hope that by doing so it would contribute to creating an environment conducive to the success of the peace process and the efforts of the Quartet in pursuing the road map. Instead, the United States is encouraging terrorism and Israeli aggression in the Middle East. How can a super Power that is combating terrorism — and requesting the cooperation of other countries to complete that mission — simultaneously encourage a rogue State, Israel, which has usurped Palestinian land over two stages in 1948 and in 1967 and which continues to expand and invade other neighbouring Arab countries? Israel occupied the Egyptian Sinai, the Syrian Golan Heights and Beirut, the capital of Lebanon. How then, we wonder, or rather can the United States Administration wonder, about the lack of success in its campaign against terrorism and why the people of the world hate its biased policies?

The United States has provoked the countries of Western Europe by bypassing the United Nations, dispensing with their cooperation on Iraq. Why does it not punish Lieutenant General William Boykin, the racist, extremist General who said that the God of Islam is a false god? What was President Bush's objective in agreeing to remove President Arafat who, in 1993, was the first Palestinian leader to reach political agreements with Israel under the sponsorship of President Clinton, who made great efforts that nearly led to a successful and mutually acceptable settlement, had it not been for the greed and deceptiveness of the Israeli leader Barak? Barak wanted to annex 9 per cent of the Palestinian territories to Israel and to lease 10 per cent of the territory of the Jordan Valley for many years while establishing early-warning stations in the heart of the Palestinian territories and imposing Israeli sovereignty over holy Muslim and Christian shrines in Jerusalem. He also refused to recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties. Later, he claimed that he had made painful concessions and then conspired with Sharon to have Sharon visit the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque. On the second day of Sharon's visit, the Israeli army fired on Muslim worshippers, sparking the intifada in retaliation to that act of Israeli terrorism.

Despite three years of bloody fighting, the Palestinian resistance responded to the Quartet and to international public opinion by declaring a three-month truce and ceasefire. However, Israel failed to respond to that initiative; rather, it continued its acts of terrorism, assassinating 86 Palestinian citizens — including several political leaders — within a 51-day period after the truce had begun. That compelled the resistance factions to retaliate. Today, despite all that, the Palestinian resistance expresses its willingness to declare a second truce and ceasefire, provided that Israel reciprocates.

Sharon has continued his acts of terrorism by demolishing houses, arresting and assassinating Palestinian citizens, tightening the siege on the Palestinian people and continuing to build settlements and the racist separation wall. On the morning of 5 October 2003, Israel shelled Ain Sahib, a village near Damascus in Syria, claiming that it was a training camp for Palestinian resistance elements. What is odd is that United States President Bush said, "Israel must not feel constrained in defending itself", when he knows very well that, for more than 35 years, Israel has been occupying Syrian territory in the Golan, where it has built 37 Israeli settlements. What, then, justifies such an Israeli action in an Arab country that respects the truce? There is no resistance in the occupied Golan that can be used as a pretext by Israel, while Israel claims that the reason for its continued occupation of Palestinian territories is the presence of the Palestinian resistance, which it calls terrorism.

In mid-October, Israeli forces destroyed more than 200 houses of Palestinian refugees in the Rafah refugee camp. Later, the spokesman for the United States State Department said, "We understand Israel's need to defend itself". And, in one of his statements, President Bush said that when the Palestinian Authority chooses a leader that really wants to combat terrorist organizations, that will enable the peace process to resume where it left off.

There are now 26 Israeli settlements in Gaza, constituting 8 per cent of its area; 6,429 Israeli settlers live in these settlements. However, 1.3 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, which is only 365 square kilometres in area. We note that 5,800 Palestinians live in each square kilometre of Gaza, while the areas in which the Israeli settlements have been built have a population density of 55 Israeli settlers per square kilometre.

Moreover, Israel has built a concrete separation wall more than 7 kilometres long and 8 metres high in the city of Rafah, on the Egyptian border. Israel has bulldozed all farmland on the border strip, which is 100 kilometres long, and has cut down tens of thousands of citrus and banana trees, thus destroying the economic livelihood of the residents. Furthermore, Israel has demolished 900 houses and displaced their owners, who have become refugees. Israel has bulldozed a total of 3,270 dunams of farmland in the governorate of Rafah alone, and it has also destroyed irrigation wells, agricultural machinery, livestock barns and aviaries. It has also set up roadblocks and closed border crossings and airports, raising the unemployment rate to 70 per cent. The number of poor families has reached 5,228.

The Israeli Information Centre, B'Tselem, reports that the lives of around 875,000 Palestinians will be affected directly by the racist separation wall and that 650,000 dunams of land in the West Bank — 11.6 per cent of the West Bank — will be left between the wall and the green line.

After the wall is built, the land confiscated and 200 settlements constructed, how can the Palestinian-Israeli conflict be resolved on a fair and equitable basis? Will it be possible in future to establish two neighbouring States?

The Sharm el-Sheikh Summit and the Aqaba Summit were held in June, and President Bush, Arab leaders and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas all pledged to work to move the peace process forward and to implement its provisions in accordance with the road map. But we soon started to feel that Sharon was beginning to abandon his stand on the commitments he made. He assassinated a political leader of the resistance, thus creating tension once again.

It appears that the logic of the United States in dealing with Iraq is now influencing the Arab-Israeli conflict. Senator Lieberman supports Israel's position in opposing the removal of Israeli settlements, while it was backed by Howard Dean, another Democratic candidate. *The New York Times* said in an editorial that it strongly opposed what Senator Lieberman said in that respect and that ending settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories was a fundamental and key issue for the survival of the Israeli State.

Israel must prepare a plan to exit the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order not only to enable the

Palestinians to establish a viable, contiguous and independent State but also to safeguard the future of Israel itself.

It appears that these days President Bush is afraid to pressure Israel and risk losing the votes of millions of mid-western neoconservatives with Zionist tendencies. This group is considered his key electoral base and represents a powerful ideological force with a strong influence on American political life. I need not even mention the crisis situation in which the United States Administration has become embroiled in Iraq. It is odd that Israel has even attacked its friends in Europe as well as neutral United Nations representatives such as John Ziegler, who blamed Israel for causing widespread hunger among Palestinians.

Israel has warned that it might not be willing to cooperate in future with United Nations investigations in the field of human rights. The international envoy had warned that the Palestinian territories were on the brink of a humanitarian disaster because of the extremely stringent military measures taken by the Israeli forces.

The continued United States occupation of Iraq will serve only to provoke all of those forces resisting United States policy in Iraq and in the Arab and Muslim worlds. More United States violence will only lead to greater resistance. If the United States of America were to adopt the traditional British policy of "divide and conquer" by attempting to ethnically and religiously pit Iraqi factions against each other, the United States occupation will never be able to create a secure territory. However, if the United States chooses to do what the Secretary-General has called for — internationalizing the Iraqi issue politically and in terms of security; establishing, as soon as possible, a new Iraqi constitution; and holding general elections — that would lay the foundation for a new national State. That option which the Secretary-General is proposing is the best means of building Iraqi national unity on a democratic basis.

Democracy is the watchword that the United States has used in the Arab world. This means that it is important for the United States to cooperate with the countries neighbouring Iraq instead of threatening them, imposing sanctions on them or trying them, as the United States Congress has done when it passed the Syrian Accountability Act.

When we speak of Iraq, we are speaking also of the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine, because the Palestinian cause lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Bush reassured Sharon by saying, "There is no one to threaten you any more." Is it not strange that the peoples of Europe have affirmed in a survey that Israel is the premier State that poses the most important threat to international peace and security?

Let us recall that European States were the ones that supported the Israeli State and that extended support and assistance to it for many years, to the extent of forming a military alliance with it to carry out a tripartite act of aggression against Egypt.

It appears that the Israeli actions that we have witnessed and all the material changes that Israel has made to the Palestinian territories will definitely lead to the establishment of a single State in which there is neither justice nor democracy, characterized by entrenched racism, which denies the Palestinian people their national rights.

In closing, we in the Arab world truly seek a friendship with the United States through the establishment of equitable ties that maintain a balance of interests that brooks no distinction between us and Israel. To that end, the United States must abandon the use of double standards and cease favouring Israel over the entire Arab world.

Implementation of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) in support of the road map requires the Quartet's active role and pressure on Israel to abide by the will of the international community, so that security and stability can prevail in the Middle East. That can happen only if the United States ends its support for Israel or if the United Nations imposes economic sanctions on Israel. Here, we thank the Secretary-General for his report on the racist separation wall, and we affirm the need for the General Assembly to adopt additional measures, including a request for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice.

The path to peace can be achieved only if the parties concerned comply with and implement the relevant United Nations resolutions calling for the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from Arab territories, the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, the dismantlement of the settlements and a just solution to the issue of

Palestinian refugees, securing their return to their homes.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria and Romania, and the European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area Iceland and Liechtenstein align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East has been through yet another year of violence and tragedy. Bloodshed, confrontations and provocations have been accompanied by violence, terrorism and military measures. And sadly, once again, it has been the ordinary Palestinians and Israelis who have been taken hostage to the conflict and who have paid the price in terms of human suffering, disillusion and mistrust.

The European Union is deeply concerned by the situation in the region and has noted that, despite the support given by the international community to the quest for a just and lasting solution, insufficient effort has been made by the concerned parties to seize the opportunity for peace set out in the Performance-based Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, presented by the Quartet to the parties on 30 April 2003. We therefore call once again on both parties, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to live up to the commitments they undertook in this regard at the Aqaba summit on 4 June 2003.

The European Union is firmly committed to the clear objective of two States, Israel and a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security, in the framework of comprehensive peace in the Middle East, as laid out in the road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We strongly reaffirm the principles stated in the road map. In that respect, the European Union welcomes and emphasizes the unanimous endorsement of the road map made by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003).

The European Union also urges all sides in the region to immediately implement policies conducive to dialogue and negotiations. The European Union's relationship with those who take steps to the contrary will be inevitably affected by such behaviour.

The European Union strongly condemns the suicide attacks and other acts of violence that have occurred over the last few months and calls upon all sides to refrain from any provocative action which can further escalate the tension.

Terrorist attacks against Israel have no justification whatsoever and damage the legitimate Palestinian national cause. The European Union reiterates that it is the duty of all countries, including those in the region, to actively cooperate in the fight against terrorism and to abstain from all support, direct or indirect, to terrorist organizations.

The European Union emphasizes once again that, in compliance with the road map, the Palestinian leadership must concretely demonstrate its determination in the fight against extremist violence and urges the Palestinian Government and the Palestinian President to take immediate steps to confront individuals and groups conducting and planning terrorist attacks. The European Union still believes that Palestinian security services should be consolidated under the control of the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior.

While recognizing Israel's right to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks, the European Union urges the Government of Israel, in exercising that right, to fully respect international law, in particular human rights law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, to exert maximum effort to avoid civilian casualties and to take no action that aggravates the humanitarian and economic plight of the Palestinian people. It also calls on Israel to abstain from any punitive measures which are not in accordance with international law, including extra-judicial killings.

The European Union is particularly concerned by the route marked out for the so-called security fence in the occupied West Bank. The envisaged departure of the route from the Green Line could prejudice future negotiations and make the two-State solution physically impossible to implement. It would cause further humanitarian and economic hardship for the Palestinians. Thousands of Palestinians west of the fence are being cut off from essential services in the West Bank, while Palestinians east of the fence will lose access to land and water resources.

The European Union calls on Israel to stop and reverse its settlement policy and to immediately dismantle settlements built after March 2001. We also

call on Israel to lift the blockade on the occupied territories and withdraw its forces from Palestinian cities to the positions held prior to September 2000. Moreover, Israel must ensure the full, safe and unfettered access to the occupied territories by humanitarian personnel and assistance, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

More than ever, a clear political perspective is needed in order to ease tensions and rekindle the hopes and aspirations of the peoples in the region for a peaceful solution to the conflict. In that context, the European Union also welcomes initiatives from civil society on both sides and is ready to further assist in the effort to promote rapprochement, confidence-building and the search for lasting peace.

We are also encouraged by the relatively calm situation of the last few weeks, and we hope that a ceasefire will be agreed soon. We would like to commend the efforts currently made by the Government of Egypt in that regard, as well as the contribution of Jordan and other countries of the region in the efforts to restart the momentum for peace.

Finally, the European Union reiterates once again its determination to contribute to a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and resolution 1397 (2002) on the road map presented by the Quartet to the parties on 30 April 2003, accepted by them and endorsed by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), and stresses the importance and the urgency of setting up a credible and effective third-party monitoring mechanism composed of all members of the Quartet.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Document A/58/35, which is before us today — the report of the Palestinian Rights Committee — draws up an exhaustive and well-documented list of the exactions and brutalities committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and thereby places our review of the question of Palestine in a particularly worrisome context.

During the past year, the Israeli army has relentlessly pursued its policy of extrajudicial killings, shelling of refugee camps and destruction of public infrastructures and houses, mobilizing its formidable powers against unarmed populations, blocking access by humanitarian organizations to persons in distress, choking off all socio-economic life and radically

obstructing the functioning of what remains of the Palestinian administration. This policy of adopting the worst possible tactics against a population wounded in body, bruised in spirit and despoiled of their property can only further diminish all chances of peace while fuelling the frustration and despair of the Palestinian people. This population is condemned to extreme poverty and to living in homes or makeshift shelters that are threatened with imminent destruction, unable to satisfy their most elementary needs and constantly fearing for their lives and security.

Algeria, which follows with deep concern the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, wishes to reiterate its firm condemnation of the inhuman practices perpetrated by the Israeli army against the Palestinians, their property and their institutions. On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which marks 56 years of plunder and injustice, my country wishes to reiterate its firm support to the heroic struggle being waged by this proud people to fulfil their inalienable national rights.

Ostensibly exercising its right to self-defence and ensuring its safety, Israel is committing today the worst acts precisely in order to deprive the Palestinian people of minimal security and to impose new unrealistic security demands upon a virtually annihilated Palestinian Authority, of which the legitimate and democratically elected leader, President Arafat, is the object of a decision of expulsion as scandalous as it is illegal. Acting in this manner, Israel is actually only pursuing the implementation of a policy of occupation and territorial expansion and denying the Palestinian reality, which remains nonetheless rather stubborn. It is in deliberate contravention of the obligations imposed by not only the Fourth Geneva Convention, especially in paragraph 6 of article 49, but also the principles of international law, that Israel, the occupying Power, is pursuing the policy of illegal settlements, forward posts and settlement roads, as spelled out in paragraph 21 of the Committee's report. By these draconian measures, Israel is in fact redrawing a new map of the occupied territories on the ground and, at every occasion, appropriating more lands to satisfy its territorial voraciousness.

By building an expansionist wall — unanimously condemned by the international community — in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, Israel is committing one further crime

against the Palestinian people, who also share that same desire to further expand the limits of their territorial space. The construction of this wall of shame, which imposes political faits accomplis that are totally unjust, has thus led Israel to confiscate and destroy the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians and to illegally and in a de facto manner annex vast expanses of occupied Palestinian land, threatening to impoverish and further isolate families of refugees and to destroy the integrity of the Palestinian territory. Furthermore, pursuing the building of this wall constitutes a direct threat to peace and annihilates any physical possibility for the future creation of an independent Palestinian State, thus emptying the road map, which the Security Council has finally endorsed in resolution 1515 (2003), of its very substance.

The General Assembly, on 21 October, at the resumption of its tenth special session on the illegal measures taken by Israel, urgently called upon Israel to refrain from pursuing the construction of this wall and to dismantle the part that has already been built. Now that the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of that decision (A/58/416) has been made public, establishing that Israel has not complied with the demands contained in resolution 1515 (2003), this Assembly should now take the necessary measures to lead Israel to conform to international legality.

While the Palestinians, since Madrid and Oslo, have made the strategic choice of opting for peace and have positively welcomed the endorsement of the road map by the Security Council, Israel has opted for a policy of further ignoring international agreements, as it deliberately turned its back upon peace, rejecting resolution 1515 (2003) and entrenching itself in a position of rejection and intransigence, since it feels confident of its impunity. Faced with this situation, the international community must act without delay and contribute to creating an environment favourable to the road map's implementation without delay. Any delay, indeed, can only increase the distress of the Palestinian people and encourage Israel to impose new faits accomplis in the territories and to reduce to nothing every chance for the settlement of this question, as it did for the Oslo process. It falls to the Quartet, in particular, to shoulder its responsibilities by redoubling its efforts with a view to introducing a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, applying the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the

principles of Madrid and implementing the road map as it was when it was made public and as endorsed by the Security Council.

The Council, for its part, should be called upon, pursuant to Chapter VII of the Charter, to set up a mechanism to ensure the road map's implementation according to a specific timetable. In order for it to be effective, that mechanism could, under the aegis of the United Nations, take the form of a multinational interposed force between the Palestinian and Israeli parties with a view to ensuring stability and calm in the region and supervising respect for mutual commitments as spelled out in the road map.

It is our conviction that the definitive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict requires an end to the occupation and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from all of the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights and the last enclave occupied in Lebanon. Our Assembly, whose responsibility vis-à-vis the Palestinian people is great, should respond appropriately to the aspiration of that people to recover its legitimate rights, first and foremost the right to self-determination and to create its own independent State with Al Quds as its capital.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for providing us with the comprehensive report contained in document A/58/35. We believe that the report greatly illustrates the present situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, where Israeli oppressive policies and inhumane practices against the Palestinian people continue unabated.

Year after year, when we review the annual report of the Committee, we find the same systematic pattern of human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory: the escalation of violence, tragic loss of life, destruction of Palestinian homes, confiscation of lands and infringement of the norms and principles of international law.

The Committee's report provides us with an overview of the deteriorating situation in the Palestinian territory, which, in turn, further exacerbates the situation in the Middle East and threatens international peace and security. As outlined in the report, aggression and violence by Israel took a heavy toll on Palestinian lives and property in 2003. The

steady erosion of their basic rights has forced the people of Palestine to languish in a hopeless situation that worsens every day. Since September 2000, more than 2,800 Palestinians have been killed and over 46,600 have been wounded. In other words, 3 people have been killed and 43 have been wounded every day for the past three years.

Israeli actions in the Palestinian territory show contempt for humanity. The situation there calls for urgent international attention and opposition to the inhumane acts perpetrated by the Israeli regime. As the Palestinians are merely struggling for their basic rights, it is not just or acceptable that the daily criminal practices of the occupying regime enjoy some essential outside support.

During the course of the period under review, the occupying Power continued its territorial expansion through the illegal construction of settlements, outposts and road networks. Closures and curfews have continued, severely restricting the movement of Palestinians and their access to medical centres, schools and their places of work. Furthermore, the issue of prisoners continues to be a highly important and painful one for thousands of Palestinian families.

The construction of the separation wall, which cuts through the West Bank, bypasses roads and grabs Palestinian land, was among the illegal Israeli activities that, despite international outrage, continued over the past year. As a result of ongoing construction activities, more Palestinian homes are being demolished and swathes of lands bulldozed and seized. The completed part of the wall has already resulted in the unlawful confiscation of 2,850 acres that were economically essential for the over 210,000 Palestinians living in that area, and has thus had a severe impact on the overall Palestinian economy.

Over the course of the past year, the targeted assassination policy formally announced by Israel has led to the deaths of more than 50 Palestinians. The occupying Power attempted to justify that extrajudicial policy as a necessary expedient in combating terrorism. It goes without saying that those killings not only constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, and particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also are a clear manifestation of Israeli State terrorism — a policy that the international community must speak out against in unison.

The legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to defend their dignity and liberate their homeland cannot and should not be branded as or equated with terrorism. The resistance of the Palestinian people against foreign occupation and brutal oppression is, in law and practice, an act of self-defence aimed at achieving self-determination.

The history of the Middle East over the past six decades attests to Israel's terrorist activities within and outside the Palestinian territories. During that period, the region has been swept up in a whirlpool of dangerous crises, the main source of which is Israel's intransigent policy to continue its occupation of the Palestinian land. Efforts to restore lasting peace and security in the region have not borne fruit thus far and will not succeed unless and until the root cause of the enduring crisis is fully and unreservedly addressed. To that end, the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland are of particular importance.

The time has come for the international community to assume its responsibility to put an end to Israel's policy of aggression and occupation. To our regret, the inability of the United Nations Security Council to shoulder its Charter-based responsibility on the Palestinian issue, owing to the abuse of the veto power by some members, has encouraged the Israeli regime to continue its egregious and unlawful policies and practices throughout the Palestinian territories.

We are of the belief that the Palestinian situation is an international issue that requires international attention and response. In fact, hope for conflict resolution and the promotion of peace and tranquillity in the Middle East remains as remote as ever owing to the intransigent behaviour of Israel.

Therefore, and in conclusion, allow me to avail myself of this opportunity to appeal to all Member States of this world Organization to join hands and voices in solidarity with the Palestinian people to regain their homeland and establish a viable and independent State, with Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. The Islamic Republic of Iran is committed to being a serious partner in that solemn undertaking.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the efforts it has exerted to fulfil its mandate. We would also like to commend the

Department of Public Information for its role in cooperating with the Committee and with the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs.

Year after year we continue to meet here to deal with one of the oldest issues on the General Assembly's agenda — the "Question of Palestine" — in an effort to support the efforts that are still being exerted to find the means for reaching a solution to that issue in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. Despite all attempts to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region, Israel has continued, through its practices, to create a volatile security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories using flimsy pretexts to implement its expansionist, settler policies. Those actions have led the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in its report (A/58/35), to record its disappointment at the lack of any real improvement in the security situation, mainly owing to the Israeli army's military raids, carried out on a regular basis against the Palestinian people, to its reoccupation of many Palestinian cities and villages, to its imposition of a curfew and to the use of excessive and indiscriminate force — including the use of fissile ammunition that human rights organizations in Israel itself believe should be banned because of the human suffering they cause. Worse than all of this is news of the Israeli army's use of helicopters and fighter jets against Palestinians in attacks that have led to battles between unequally matched forces.

In contrast with this is the Mitchell report, which called for freezing Israeli settlement activity in order to build confidence. Israel continues its expansionist settlement policy by building new settlements and expanding already existing ones, as well as by establishing observation posts and road networks in contradiction to the road map that stipulates the removal of settlement posts set up deep inside Palestinian territory since March 2001. That policy is in clear opposition to United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 446 (1979), which affirms that the settlements have no legal basis.

Within that framework falls the report issued by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia that handles the issue of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. That report notes that the geographic distribution of the settlements still strongly undermines the growth of Palestinian communities and

forms an obstacle to their economic and social development. That report also noted that consecutive Israeli Governments have strongly encouraged immigration from Israel to the settlements by offering privileges and generous financial incentives to settlers, to the point where the annual growth in settlement population has reached 11 or 12 per cent.

What is worth noting here is Israel's insistence on usurping more Palestinian territory, in blatant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, in its efforts to build the illegal separation wall which Ms. Catherine Bertini, the Personal Humanitarian Envoy for the Secretary-General, described as a new form of closure. Consequences of that separation wall will cause the already deteriorated conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories to deteriorate further, and will directly affect the lives of more than 200,000 Palestinians living in 67 cities and villages in the West Bank. If that wall — which blocks access to sources of clean water — is not removed, it will lead to the ruin of agricultural land and will damage the flow of goods and social and educational services.

The Committee's report (A/58/35) states that the occupation authorities have issued orders to confiscate land in order to establish a so-called Jerusalem barrier — which will lead to the isolation of 50,000 Palestinians on the Israeli side of the barrier — despite international calls to put an end to the confiscation of land and to settlement activity. In this context, a 2002 report of the Secretary-General (A/57/621) noted a rapid expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including those around East Jerusalem, calling that a cause for concern. Those settlements have now begun surrounding East Jerusalem and separating it from the rest of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank.

This activity contradicts United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolution 467 (1980), which the Council adopted as a measure to stop Israeli parliament legislation proclaiming Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital. It also contradicts Security Council resolution 478 (1980), adopted 20 August 1980, in which the Council affirmed that all administrative and legislative measures that would change the nature and status of Jerusalem are null and void, especially the basic law pertaining to Jerusalem.

According to previous reports and as affirmed by the Secretary-General's current report of 24 November 2003, the separation wall and the intended course of

action in Jerusalem violate the Green Line. Moreover, seizing Palestinian territory in order to build that wall is based on military orders. The report of the Secretary-General notes that the separation wall will further fragment the West Bank, which is already fragmented by the closures imposed by Israel for the past three years. It will have a negative effect on the recommendations of the road map that call for making gestures of goodwill in order to build confidence on both sides.

The building of the separation wall cannot be justified as a security measure, since the wall itself, as the Secretary-General has noted, violates international law and will only undermine peace by making it more difficult to establish an independent and viable Palestinian State with contiguous territory and will also increase the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Common sense analysis of these Israeli measures and actions leads to the clear and unambiguous conclusion that its practices completely contradict United Nations resolutions and instruments, especially international law, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Palestinian question is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arabs have sought to establish a just and comprehensive peace through the Arab peace initiative that the report of the Secretary-General indicates will remain a fundamental element in all future efforts towards peace.

A solution to the Palestinian issue requires the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and compliance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the land-for-peace principle. It also requires implementation of the road map, as stipulated by Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), as well as by the recently adopted Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), which supported the road map and the establishment of two States living side by side in peace and security. It also requires supporting the efforts of the Quartet; Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories and other occupied Arab territories, in addition to recognizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, at the forefront of which is the right to self-determination; the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital and a solution to the problem of the Palestinian

refugees, according to General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, to thank Mr. Papa Louis Fall, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the distinguished members of the Committee for their efforts to promote justice for the Palestinian cause, and to uncover the facts about the deplorable Israeli practices that have contributed to the complexity and the continuation of the problem to the present day. On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government and people of the United Arab Emirates reaffirm their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their support for their just struggle to achieve their legitimate aspiration to establish an independent State, like other peoples in the world.

Despite the great success that the United Nations has achieved over the past five decades in the area of decolonization — granting independence to oppressed people and ensuring their exercise of the right to self-determination — regrettably, we find that the most prominent and most dangerous case of colonization still exists — the Israeli occupation of Palestine — which has had a devastating and dangerous effect on the humanitarian, social, environmental and economic conditions of Palestinians and Arabs, threatening to destroy the security situation in the region and the rest of the world.

Having followed the daily events in the Palestinian territories for the last 55 years, we find there has been a fixed Israeli strategy to obstruct any solution to the Palestinian problem as stated in General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which partitioned Palestine into two States, one Israeli and the other Palestinian. That Israeli strategy aims to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, to perpetuate the state of occupation and the illegal annexation of Palestine by altering its historical, political and demographic characteristics and to continue the aggression against the indigenous Arab population, displacing it into wretched refugee camps, causing a diaspora and stripping them of their legitimate ties to their homeland, Palestine.

Here we have to wonder why the Palestinian people should continue to suffer all these forms of aggression, injustice, oppression and misery and the

violation of their national rights and their basic human rights at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces at a time when lawfulness and legitimacy, globalization, democracy and cooperation have prevailed and solutions have been found for all forms of colonization, racial discrimination and other human misdeeds that had been widespread in the age of lawlessness. Is it reasonable for the international community, represented by the United Nations, to content itself with issuing resolutions and delivering statements condemning and denouncing this extraordinary situation without moving to the stage of taking measures that would compel Israel to stop its aggression and its dangerous policy of illegally confiscating Arab lands and violating their national rights?

The persistence and intransigence of successive Israeli Governments, including the present one, in continuing to adopt policies of colonization, expansionism and illegal settlement-building have resulted in the confiscation of lands and wide-ranging genocidal crimes that have killed hundreds of thousands of innocent Palestinians. According to international law, humanitarian law, human rights laws conventions and protocols, those acts are considered war crimes that cannot be ignored.

The international community's lack of concern and its disregard of those Israeli policies have perpetuated that policy and have deepened the wide-ranging despair, frustration and resistance among the Arab and Palestinian population, intensifying the cycle of violence in the region, especially during the second intifada, when the Israeli authorities committed the most heinous forms of aggression, oppression, collective punishment, shelling, barbaric killing and the use of excessive force against children, women and vulnerable individuals. Israel has done that under the pretence of security in order to justify its ongoing, unacceptable violations of all agreements previously reached between Israeli Governments and the Palestinian Authority and to reoccupy cities and confiscate Palestinian land and natural resources.

In order to create a de facto situation of its illegal expansionist and settlement plans in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, the Israeli Government has used the international campaign against terrorism to divert attention from those practices and to justify its continued and repeated aggression and incursions into Palestinian cities, villages and refugee camps and the

extrajudicial execution of hundreds of Palestinian citizens who rejected the occupation. It also launched a series of campaigns of utterly false allegations against the Palestinian Authority in order to justify the siege and aggression imposed upon it and its security institutions, aiming to weaken and discredit the Palestinian Authority and to facilitate the construction of what it calls "the separation security wall". It is actually a racist wall that runs deep into the Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds al-Sharif, thus unilaterally defining the borders of the State of Greater Israel in the region and closing the door on any possibility of successfully implementing the road map and on all other chances for a final settlement that would ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

Since it considers the Palestinian question to be at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its condemnation of the Israeli violations, which are the direct cause of the faltering of the peace process negotiations, which have come to a dead end. It also reaffirms the special responsibility of the United Nations, especially the Security Council and its influential members, as well as the members of the Quartet, in putting an end to the Israeli aggression and in ensuring a final, comprehensive and just solution to this issue, based on international laws and resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), as well as the latest Council resolution, 1515 (2003). We welcome resolution 1515 (2003) because of its political support for the road map, which is in conformity with the 2001 Arab peace initiative of Beirut.

My Government also maintains that in order to contain the ongoing violence in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and in the region as a whole, it is imperative that the international community refrain from using a policy of double-standards. At the same time, it should take immediate measures to ensure the necessary international protection of the Palestinian people and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons and to put an immediate and effective end to Israeli crimes and aggression, ensuring the dismantlement of illegal Israeli settlements and Israel's full and unconditional withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including al-Quds al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Shab'a farms in southern Lebanon.

The international community should also ensure the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with international law and the road map, which Israel has been deliberately flouting. Otherwise, our region, strategically important in international and economic relations, will continue to suffer a state of escalating tension and instability, which, in turn, will affect regional and international peace and security.

Mr. Ben Mustapha (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to express my great appreciation for the attention that the General Assembly has given to the Palestinian cause and to the deteriorating situation in the Middle East in pursuit of consolidating the foundations of peace and stability in the region and in support of Palestinians' and Arabs' right to recover their land and their legitimate rights.

The situation in the Middle East region has reached a critical stage requiring the concerted efforts of the international community and all influential parties in order to stop the cycle of violence and conflict that has befallen the region and to return it to the cycle of negotiations and dialogue. What is required is serious and responsible action aimed at ending the conflict and reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive solution that ensures the liberation of all occupied Arab land and the peaceful coexistence of all peoples of the region.

We believe that the international community must act with determination to implement internationally binding resolutions on the Middle East conflict, in particular Security Council resolutions 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). Those two resolutions set forth the clear need to establish a Palestinian State that would coexist side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders, which is the only means of establishing lasting peace in the region.

Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) reaffirms once again the commitment of the international community to implement the road map as the framework for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; reiterates that any solution must encompass all aspects of the conflict between Israel and the Arab States; and makes clear the need for both parties, Arabs and Israelis, to comply with the terms of the road map in order to translate into reality the vision of a region where two States live side by side, in conditions of

peace and security; to put an end to the whole Arab-Israeli conflict; and to restore conditions for peace and stability in the region.

The establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace requires Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and from remaining Lebanese occupied territory, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. It is also important that the international community learn from the events of the past decade in order to avoid situations that have in the past led to an undermining of the peace process, and that it therefore create conditions that are conducive to future successful negotiations aimed at implementing the provisions of the road map, so as to put an end to the conflict in the region.

We are hopeful that the Quartet will act to ensure implementation of the road map in order to build trust between Israelis and Palestinians and to open the door to the resumption of peace negotiations, in order to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, including primarily the establishment of an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. It is undeniable that the policy of *fait accompli*, as reflected in the expansion of settlement-building and the ongoing construction of the separation wall, undermines the road map and the peace process as a whole. This only heightens the responsibility of the international community to compel Israel to put an end to its repeated aggression against the Palestinian people and its national institutions, to respect international legitimacy and the provisions of international humanitarian law, to abandon its settlement policies and to seriously resume negotiations.

Tunisia believes that, as reflected in the call made by its President, Mr. Zine El Abidine, it is important to ensure international protection for the Palestinian people. That call has won the support of many States, as it is fully consonant with the road map. We believe also that an instrument is required to implement this. We call on the United Nations and its specialized agencies to continue to play their central role by fully supporting the aspirations of the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate rights and by supporting also the new Palestinian Government in promoting its national institutions and meeting the challenges of the next phase.

The establishment of a Palestinian State, the reconstruction of what has been destroyed in the occupied territories and the need to address the humanitarian situation facing the Palestinian people is the shared humanitarian responsibility of the international community, which must provide sufficient emergency assistance to address the economic and social conditions of that people.

Tunisia, which is firmly convinced of the justice of the Palestinian cause and which has supported the Palestinian people throughout their long ordeal has always sought constructively to contribute to any attempt to resolve comprehensively and conclusively this issue, from the Madrid Conference to the Arab Summit held in Beirut in March 2002. The initiatives emanating therefrom prompted more aggression by Israel against the Palestinian people, and it also continued to refuse to comply with the agreements it has signed.

Under the auspices of the President of the Republic, Mr. Zine El Abidine, we have supported all bilateral, regional and international plans to find a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the problem, so that the Palestinian people can achieve their legitimate rights; in order to create conditions for peace, stability and peaceful coexistence in the region of the Middle East; and to provide opportunities for its peoples to seek development and reconstruction.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not reiterate our Government's appreciation for the ongoing efforts of the United Nations and of all of its bodies, under the direction of the Secretary-General, to reactivate its role in addressing the issue of the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict and in easing the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people. This will strengthen international efforts to put an end to chronic conflicts and hotbeds of tensions worldwide, in particular in the Middle East, and will renew the spirit of solidarity, tolerance and understanding among the States and peoples of the Middle East on the way to the consolidation of peace and security in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Mr. Kronfol (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Fifty-six years have elapsed since the adoption by the General Assembly, at its second session, of resolution 181 (II). That resolution was the very first attempt by the nascent international Organization to put an end to the conflict in Palestine between the indigenous

Palestinian Arab population and groups of Zionist settlers, most of whom had come from Europe following the Second World War to establish, under the British mandate, a Jewish national homeland on Palestinian territory.

Resolution 181 (II) called for a solution providing for the partition of Mandate Palestine into two States, one Arab and the other Jewish, with a combined economic federation. Despite the fact that the Palestinian Arabs at the time constituted more than 90 per cent of the population, however, the partition resolution gave half the area of Palestine to the 10 per cent of Jewish settlers, for no apparent reason other than international pressure, which was basically motivated by compassion for the persecution endured by the European Jews at the hands of the Nazis and their allies before and during the Second World War, and the domestic pressure brought to bear on the British forces by Zionist terrorist organizations such as Stern, the Irgun and the Hagganah. Those organizations sought to spread panic among the Palestinian people and to maltreat them in order to force them to leave the country. That period was infamous for the massacres that claimed the lives of thousands of Palestinians in their villages and towns, which caused most of the remaining Palestinians to leave and find refuge in neighbouring States. It also led to the Zionist organizations' seizure of the British army's weapons storehouses and the Palestinians' land and possessions.

Every year since then, the General Assembly has considered the file of the Palestinian question, which has continued to expand and to worsen. The Assembly adopts appropriate resolutions that cannot be implemented, while the Security Council considers the atrocities persistently carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people and also adopts resolutions that cannot be implemented. And since then, Israel has refused to implement any resolution adopted by the Organization that would restore any right or respect for the Palestinians. Israel persists in claiming that those resolutions could not be adopted under the provisions of Chapter VII of the Charter.

Ever since its inception, Israel has pursued an established strategy that has been implemented by successive Governments and military leaders. The most important elements of that policy were and remain the following. The first is to increase the number of Israel's Jewish inhabitants by bringing them from the States of the diaspora, increasing the number of

settlements to accommodate them and confiscating the largest possible amount of land and water from the Palestinians, using the carrot-and-stick approach. The second is to rely on Western nations to provide material and military assistance, as well as compensation for the victims of Nazism, in order to build up Israel's military capacity to oppress the Palestinians and to carry out aggression against the neighbouring Arab States that support them. The third element is to prevent the Palestinians from returning to their homeland and from pursuing their livelihoods or to force them out of the country, and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State in any way possible. The fourth is to accuse anyone who does not go along with those Israeli policies of being anti-Semitic or of colluding with terrorism, thereby slandering such parties.

All Israeli Governments have pursued that expansionist policy of aggression, although some have used the methods of prevarication and procrastination, while successive military commands have continued to serve as an instrument to implement the policy by practising daily violence and coercion against Palestinians. Thus, in the occupied Palestinian territories and the neighbouring Arab States that have received Palestinian refugees, those Israeli Governments have launched campaigns no less atrocious than the practices of war criminals. Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territories and is attempting to annex Al-Quds, the Syrian Golan and those parts of southern Lebanon that remain under occupation, including the Sheba'a farms.

The question of Palestine remains unresolved, as though it were an insurmountable obstacle. One of its ramifications has been the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Israeli occupation of Arab territories; other ramifications have included the question of the Middle East, including regional peace and regional threats.

During the 56 years that have elapsed since Israel's inception, it has been proved to the whole world that there is a Palestinian people — a people wedded to its land, its culture and its humanity — that stands brave and steadfast in the face of the Israeli army of occupation and the tyranny that groups from the countries of the diaspora — which have nothing to do with their land or its history and are alien to the region and its courageous, defiant peoples — are trying to impose upon that people.

It is regrettable that the international community, because of its great commitment to peaceful solutions, has contributed to the failure to stand up to Israel's oppressive military might. It has also contributed to the emergence of the pariah State of Israel, which has persisted in its refusal to comply with United Nations resolutions or to respect its international commitments and has continued to pursue policies of embezzlement and terrorism.

The most obvious evidence of that can be found in the hundreds of resolutions rejected by Israel, which, when the international community adopts them, accuses it of siding with the Palestinians and against Israel because Israel is a Jewish State, as if it wanted the world to forget that it is also an occupying Power that colonizes the territories of others. Further glaring and repeated evidence can be found in Israel's rejection of the Organization's resolutions, from General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which provided for the return of refugees to their homeland, to Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), which called once again for the establishment of a Palestinian State to live side by side in peace with the State of Israel, to this year's General Assembly resolution (ES-10/13) calling upon Israel to halt its construction of the racist separation wall to the Security Council resolution (1515 (2003)) that adopted the road map.

Today, as far as we know, Israel rejected the Geneva document — although both the road map and that document do not provide for the minimum of Palestinian rights, but are simply a starting point for negotiations. Everyone knows full well that Israel has rejected numerous offers of peace, including the unparalleled Arab peace initiative adopted by the Beirut Summit in 2002.

Today, more than ever before, it is the Israeli Government that is the outlaw and the pariah in the international community, and not the Palestinians, who are seeking — with the lives of their most beloved sons — to establish their State on their national territory, with Al-Quds as its capital, in accordance with the borders of 4 June 1967. Israel is the cause of the woes and wars that have afflicted the region and not the Palestinians. It is Israel that threatens international peace and security by refusing the rules of peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region. Israel will not earn the respect of the peoples of the world and will remain heinously guilty — in spite of their public relations and propaganda campaigns,

which even simpletons no longer believe — until it accepts the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid Conference and the land-for-peace principle, and unless Israel respects the rights of the Palestinian people in full, including its right to life and to establish its State on its national territory. Otherwise, Israel will forever remain an oppressor State that occupies the lands of others and kills their people.

That, in a nutshell, is the continuing tragedy of the Palestinian question — the question of a people with right on its side in the face of an occupying and colonizing Power. It is inevitable that the people of Palestine will defeat Israeli colonialism and occupation, regardless of the sacrifice. The international community will stand by the people of Palestine until they are liberated from the power of occupation and their sons are returned to their homeland. We should all adhere to this just position until the end of the Israeli colonization and occupation of the Arab territories and the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): On this day when we are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the United Nations, my delegation would like first of all to reaffirm the continued and unequivocal support of the Government and people of Malaysia for the leadership and people of Palestine and our solidarity with them in their brave struggle to assert their inalienable rights. We remain committed to assisting President Yasser Arafat, as well as Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei and his cabinet, in their efforts to achieve peace and to create a State of Palestine.

My delegation welcomes this debate on agenda item 38 on the "Question of Palestine" in conjunction with the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which is of great significance to the Palestinian people and their legitimate cause. However, we find it highly regrettable that the debate today is taking place amidst the incessant, bloody military operations carried out by Israel against innocent Palestinians, which have continued unabated for the past three years. The Israeli campaign has resulted in horrific human and material losses, caused untold misery and destruction and created a humanitarian emergency of an unprecedented scale in the occupied Palestinian territory. Those are

among the conclusions of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in its report (A/58/35).

Malaysia is deeply concerned that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds al-Sharif, remains very grave and volatile. The Palestinian population continues to suffer from the reprehensible, oppressive and inhumane policies and practices of the occupying Power. We have yet to witness any real easing of the tension, despite the efforts of the Quartet and the international community to put the peace process back on track, particularly through the implementation of the road map. Instead, we are witnessing the intensification of Israeli military operations, resulting in further killing and greater injuries to innocent Palestinian civilians. Illegal Israeli settlement activities have also been on the increase. All of those actions deserve the strongest condemnation. Israel must put a halt to them without further delay and demonstrate to the international community that it is genuinely committed to a peaceful solution rather than a military one.

Malaysia reiterates that Israel must not be allowed to employ the issues of security and the protection of its citizens against terrorism as either a pretext or a justification for their oppressive and violent measures against the Palestinian people. Since September 2000, some 2,947 Palestinians and 862 Israelis have been killed. Most tragically, more than 590 Palestinian and 100 Israeli children have been killed during that period. The disproportionate number of deaths on one side speaks for itself. Excessive use of force by Israel has generated violent retaliatory acts, including suicide bombings, by Palestinians.

Violence inflicted upon innocent civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, deserves equal condemnation. But such violence is surely owing to Israel's continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, as well as the provocative and oppressive policies and practices pursued by successive Israeli Governments for the past 36 years. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Israel to realize that in order to achieve peace, faithful acceptance and implementation of the road map leading to a permanent two-State solution is crucial. That is the key to peace and security for both parties. We hope that resolution 1515 (2003), adopted by the Security Council on 19 November 2003, will encourage both sides to resume the peace process in

good faith and lead to the implementation of the road map in earnest and without further delay.

I am pleased to inform the General Assembly that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), issued a statement in Putrajaya, Malaysia, on 20 November 2003. In that statement, he welcomed, on NAM's behalf, the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), which endorses the Quartet's Performance-Based Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and calls on the parties to fulfil their obligations. I have requested that the Minister's statement be circulated as a document of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Malaysia shares the concern of the Committee that, while the Palestinian Authority has accepted the road map without reservations, the Government of Israel has not fully endorsed it. By putting forward a series of conditions for its acceptance, Israel is in fact threatening to render the peace plan ineffective. The inexcusable failure on the part of Israel to implement its road map obligations has not only led to the resignation of former Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and his cabinet but has caused an ensuing escalation of acts of retaliation by Palestinians. Malaysia urges both sides to comply with their road map obligations and urgently implement them fully and faithfully.

Malaysia has made clear our condemnation of violence and terrorism. We reiterate that the killing of innocent civilians in this conflict is unacceptable, be they Israelis or Palestinians. But we are outraged at the intensification of Israeli occupation, wilful killing of civilians, extrajudicial executions, destruction of homes, farmland and other property, economic strangulation, collective punishment and other practices committed deliberately and systematically against the Palestinian population. We are equally outraged at the continuation of the settlement activities on Palestinian land and, especially now, the illegal construction of the expansionist separation wall by Israel in the occupied West Bank and in areas close to East Jerusalem. Construction of this wall is proceeding in total disregard for resolution ES-10/13 adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session, on 27 October this year.

The construction of the wall deep into occupied territory is clearly in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. This structure, coupled with the continued construction of illegal settlements and roads and bridges in the occupied Palestinian territory, have already dramatically changed the status quo and adversely affected the implementation of the road map. In the longer term, this could prejudice the outcome of future permanent status negotiations and inhibit the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian State. We find this most unacceptable and look forward to the further consideration of this issue at the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which should consider the report of the Secretary-General of 24 October 2003 (A/58/416).

Another extremely disturbing development concerns the activities of Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territory. According to figures released by the Interior Ministry of Israel itself, as of July 2003, there were 231,443 illegal Israeli settlers — of which 5,415 were newcomers — settled in the occupied Palestinian territory since January 2003. Alarming, some 10,000 weapons of various types, including heavy arms, machine guns and mortars, are in the hands of the settlers, some of which were reportedly provided by the Israeli army.

Recent reports indicate that attacks by the settlers on Palestinians have become increasingly aggressive and violent, leading to further deaths and injuries. Much of this, unfortunately, is not highlighted in the media. Palestinian farmers, merchants, schoolchildren and clerics, as well as civilian properties, have apparently become the favoured targets. These attacks, including some by a new underground vigilante settler network, are obviously intended to intimidate, deter or punish the Palestinians. We strongly believe that it is incumbent upon the Government of Israel to put a complete stop to these acts by its citizens. Israel simply cannot speak of the acts of violence and terror committed by the Palestinians and ignore violence committed by its citizens against the Palestinians.

My delegation notes with grave concern that an estimated 6,500 Palestinian prisoners are being kept in Israeli detention facilities and that 687 Palestinians are being held under administrative detention by the Israeli army. This question requires the most urgent and serious attention of the Government of Israel. What is more disquieting for Malaysia is the fact that 350 of those prisoners are children, out of whom 9 per cent —

32 children — are aged between 13 and 14. It has been reported that although they are minors, these children have been treated as adult prisoners and subjected to various kinds of mistreatment and torture. Malaysia concurs with the Committee's assertion that the resolution of the question of Palestinian prisoners would be a major step towards building confidence on both sides, with a view to promoting mutual confidence and trust in the long term in order to sustain durable peace between the two sides.

Malaysia continues to support and encourage every international effort aimed at achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. We believe that the international community has a compelling responsibility to intensify its efforts to find a peaceful and durable solution to the conflict. In this connection, Malaysia reiterates its support for the important efforts of the Quartet and of other interested parties, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and looks forward to fresh and bold initiatives aimed at resuming the peace process.

Malaysia highly commends the valuable work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and of the Secretary-General. We hope that they will continue to pursue their tasks and mandates until peace is achieved and a State of Palestine is created. Malaysia also hopes that the days ahead will soon reveal some positive developments toward ending the current deadlock in the peace process.

The General Assembly is the last bastion of hope for the Palestinian people. The Assembly must uphold the rule of law and the purposes and principles of the Charter. In this connection, Malaysia is pleased to join other delegations in sponsoring the four draft resolutions initiated by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that have been presented for consideration by the Assembly under this agenda item.

In conclusion, may I say that Malaysia awaits the day when the delegation of Palestine sits among us in this General Assembly Hall, seated not at the side gallery, as an observer, but seated appropriately as a full Member State of the United Nations. We look forward to the day when the international community

joins with the Palestinians in celebrating the joy of their independence and statehood. May that day come to us in the immediate future as envisaged in the road map and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Today the global community observes, with due solemnity, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is an occasion that calls for deep reflection and for thoughts on what the world can do to put an end to the bloodshed and to also create a structure of peace in that land whose people have known so much pain for so long.

We praise the leadership of Ambassador Papa Louis Fall and the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/58/416) and for his relentless endeavours in the cause of peace.

On this day the people of Bangladesh reaffirm their firm solidarity with the people of Palestine in their just and legitimate struggle for an independent and sovereign State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

The past year has witnessed a rapid deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. It has also seen the continued violation of fundamental human rights by the occupation forces. Despite occasional glimmers of hope, the peace process remains stalled. The problem is compounded by the ongoing construction of the so-called "security wall" by Israel, which seriously undermines international efforts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The illegal settlements continue to be an impediment to peace. The international community needs to act in unison, with renewed vigour and with greater resolve towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Bangladesh remains convinced that comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be guaranteed through the full and unconditional implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions. For its part, Bangladesh, as always, remains unflinchingly committed to all efforts that aim at achieving genuine peace in that region. The revival of the peace process will require courage, commitment and dedication from the concerned parties. It will require that violence of all kinds be renounced by all

sides. We have every confidence that the leadership of those involved is capable of displaying those qualities.

The safety and security of President Yasser Arafat is of paramount importance and must be guaranteed as a *sine qua non* for progress towards peace. We cannot believe that a yearning for peace is not at the heart of every person in that region, man or woman, Palestinian or Israeli.

As we observe the holy feasts of the three great faiths that emanated from that land — Islam, Judaism and Christianity, we urge that their adherents follow their messages of peace, tolerance and harmony — values that are ingrained in the traditions to which all three faiths are heir.

Mr. Mathrani (India): As we honour the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we would like to reiterate our traditional solidarity with the people of Palestine and express India's principled and continuing support for their inalienable rights. India's bond of friendship with the Palestinian people is resolute and unchangeable and based on a rich and diverse interaction spanning decades.

The situation regarding the question of Palestine continues to remain a matter of abiding and profound concern for us and the international community. Earlier this year, there was a possibility of a turning point with the launching of the road map. The agreement signed in June 2003 between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from parts of the Gaza strip and Bethlehem and the declaration of a ceasefire by various Palestinian groups, raised expectations in that direction. However, the renewed upsurge of violence since August 2003 has derailed the process and the implementation of the road map has thus been frozen. Some actions have actually reversed the political process.

We have had occasion to express our views in detail in the Security Council in September this year and later on the occasion of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly in October. We shall therefore confine ourselves today to adding to our previous remarks.

We continue to be deeply dismayed and gravely concerned by the spiral of violence, revenge and escalation of tensions witnessed in the region. The

number of casualties speaks for itself. Since September 2000, more than 2,800 Palestinians and more than 800 Israelis have been killed and thousands have been injured. Behind each and every one of these numbers are stories of human loss and suffering.

Some of the recent actions by the Government of Israel — including military strikes using disproportionate force, targeted assassinations, the construction of a separation wall, demolition of homes and the expansion of settlements — have been particularly responsible for the grave situation. Further, bombs have been set off in cafes and restaurants and attacks have been carried out against schools and public transport, including buses, creating a climate of fear and constant watchfulness. The result is a peace process in shambles.

India strongly condemns all acts of terrorism and violence and reiterates its position that there can be no justification whatsoever for attacks against unarmed civilians, including women and children. Only an immediate and complete cessation of violence, including all acts of terrorism, provocation, incitement and destruction, can provide the environment conducive to continuation of a dialogue.

These setbacks in the quest for peace are not without their deleterious effect on the humanitarian conditions in the occupied territories. According to a World Bank report, published in May 2003, 92,000 Palestinians have lost their jobs in Israel and the Israeli settlements, while another 105,000 jobs have been lost in the occupied Palestinian territories. The real per capita income fell by 46 per cent and total investment declined by approximately 90 per cent during the same period. As a result, 60 per cent of the Palestinian population is living below the poverty line.

It is unfortunate that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has become a victim or target of the continuing hostilities. Six UNRWA staff members were killed during the past year. The environment in which the Agency has to carry out its operations continues to negatively affect its ability to deliver services. Closures and blockades need to be lifted, in order to allow unhindered access for humanitarian supplies, and finances need to be released to the Palestinian Authority in order to alleviate the grave situation and avert further crises.

Continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, including the construction of a wall, serve to further exacerbate an already aggravated situation. The erection of the wall is a unilateral act not in keeping with the road map. Its building would involve the separation of Palestinians from their lands and from each other. Such action cannot be justified and must be halted. More importantly, Israel's insistence in continuing with its construction would be widely interpreted as an attempt to predetermine the outcome of any final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the basis of the principle of land for peace, as called for by relevant Security Council resolutions.

India is convinced that the key to achieving a lasting, just and peaceful settlement of the conflict and a comprehensive peace in the region lies in speedy implementation in good faith by all sides of the Quartet's road map, which contains clear timelines for the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel within secure and recognized borders. We welcome the recent adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), which contains a reiteration of those principles. We are also encouraged to read reports that renewed peace negotiations may be possible. With the requisite will and determination and strong commitment to establishing durable peace, we hope that diplomacy and statesmanship shall prevail.

Mr. Atta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The previous year saw numerous developments concerning the Palestinian question. These ranged from continued violence and counter-violence — characteristic of Israeli-Palestinian relations since that unfortunate day at the end of September 2000 — to moments of hope born out of an earnest and sincere effort to implement the vision of Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders in the historic land of Palestine. The launching of the road map, as an agreed international approach aimed at achieving the desired settlement, also constituted a focal point that commanded universal support. It brought hope for overcoming the tragic situation faced by the people of Palestine as a result of the continued Israeli occupation of its land and also for overcoming the complicated conditions prevailing in Israel as a result of its continued adherence to occupation policies and its rejected practices.

Egypt has exerted and continues to exert relentless efforts, seeking to create a favourable climate for the emergence of a new and changing situation that would pave the way for earnest and sincere negotiations. These negotiations would be aimed at achieving all the components and phases of the road map for the establishment of two neighbouring States. Unfortunately, and as we have said before, there were moments of hope and others fraught with violence and confrontation. Faced with this sad situation, everyone, foremost among them the Government of Israel, discovered that there can be no tranquillity or stability unless it is through a commitment to the faithful implementation of the road map and a peaceful political settlement of this conflict. This problem has festered for too long and its elements have simultaneously revealed the impossibility of either side imposing its vision through the use of force.

Egypt believes that the Israeli-Palestinian settlement should be based on the following specific elements: first, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on all Palestinian territories occupied since the war of 1967, including East Jerusalem; secondly, ensuring security for the two States and the two peoples, the Palestinians and the Israelis, through agreed upon measures that command the consent of both parties, without being imposed by or reflecting the will of the occupation and invasion Power. These elements and the principles and frameworks included in the road map require, for their implementation, the commitment of all parties — not only seeking a favourable climate for it but also doing the earnest, work to implement it.

There is no doubt that Israel is behind threats regarding the achievement of a settlement. It is determined to continue its policy of building settlements as well as to manipulate what is legitimate or illegitimate. We all believe and the entire international community affirms the illegitimacy of the settlements, which must be denounced along with the continued building of the wall of separation, which, despite all claims and allegations to the contrary, is aimed at the usurpation of Palestinian territories and undoubtedly has a devastating effect on the desired peace settlement.

We are today more confident than ever that one of the most necessary priorities must be the rebuilding of confidence between the two parties in order to pave the way for the creation of a favourable climate for moving

towards a settlement. Therefore, halting the settlements, stopping the construction of the wall, improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people and putting an end to the acts of violence and the use of force are all necessary elements that will enable the international community to buckle down and establish a mechanism for the implementation of the road map through serious negotiations. In this regard, we welcome the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1515 (2003), and we hope it will be promptly implemented and enjoy universal compliance.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): First of all, on behalf of the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, I would like to express my profound sympathy to the families of those who have lost their lives during the latest violence. At the same time, we would like to convey our deep appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to all those who have spent so much time and energy in resolving this serious problem in the Middle East.

With regard to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, we would like to reiterate our grave concern about the ongoing violence and disproportionate use of force that has brought about great loss of lives, materials and destruction on an unprecedented scale. We urge the parties concerned to stop the violence and all acts that may increase the tension. Both sides need to exercise maximum restraint, persevere in and speed up negotiations on the road towards a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, based on the Quartet's road map and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and, of course, the principle of land for peace.

As time passes, the question of Palestine has become more complex and the peace process is now in grave danger. In our view, the best way to end the violence before it spreads even further is to help the interested parties move towards a final peaceful agreement. In this regard, we renew our call to the international community, especially the Quartet, to continue making political and diplomatic efforts that would support and promote negotiations between Israel and Palestine with the aim of finding a final peaceful settlement to the ongoing conflict.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its consistent support to the Palestinian people under the leadership of Chairman Yasser Arafat in their struggle to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination, including the right to create a Palestinian sovereign State, living side by side and in peace with other countries in the region.

We believe that dialogue — rather than confrontation — will bring peace and security and that the question of Palestine can only be resolved by peaceful means, in accordance with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 38 for this meeting.

Before adjourning the meeting, I should like to inform members that document A/INF/58/4/Rev.2, containing a revised programme of work and schedule of plenary meetings for the main part of the fifty-eight session, was issued this morning and has been circulated in the General Assembly Hall.

I should like also to remind members that the list of speakers for items listed in document A/INF/58/4/Rev.2 is open.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.